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LATHYRUS SPLENDENS

CAMPO PEA

1943

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA
Santa Ana Cañon, Orange County, California
Established 1927 in Memory of
JOHN W. BIXBY

LATHYRUS SPLENDENS
CAMPO PEA

Leguminosae Pea Family

Perennial, climbing to 8 ft. over bushes. Stems angled, but not winged, about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick at ground, at least the lower portions remaining alive for several years. Herbage nearly glabrous, dark green. Leaves alternate; stipules 2-lobed, $\frac{1}{4}$ in. long; leaflets alternate, 5-8, broadly elliptical to linear (sometimes both kinds on same plant), $\frac{1}{2}$-$1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, with an inconspicuous mucro or tip; rachis terminating in 1-3 tendrils. Inflorescence an axillary, usually flattened raceme 3-6 in. long, with 3-10, wine-red or deep maroon flowers on pedicels $\frac{1}{2}$-1 in. long. Open flower nearly 2 in. long; calyx about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, teeth 5, unequal, 2 upper very short and 3 lower about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. long; upper petal (banner) 1-$1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, by $\frac{3}{4}$-1 in. wide, apical notch conspicuous, extremely deflexed (that is pointing exactly opposite to the rest of the flower and practically hiding the calyx and pedicel); 2 lateral petals (wings) closely investing the slightly larger keel, which represents 2 fused petals about $\frac{3}{4}$-1 in. long; claws of petals free at base, but each of the 2 wings is slightly fused to the keel about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. from the base. Ovary 1-celled, $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, containing 12-15 ovules; style nearly as long, stigmatic surface of hairs on one-half of the upper side only. Fruit a flattened legume (2-valved pod) 3 in. long, by $\frac{3}{8}$ in. broad, with seeds in 1 row on lower side, opening by both sutures and twisting to release the dark brown seeds, which are 3/16 in. across, ovoid in outline and slightly flattened. In germination the cotyledons remain below the surface and the slender shoot at first bears narrowly linear leaves with only 2 leaflets and a single tendril; a long tap root and numerous fibrous roots are soon developed. Flowers in March and April; seeds in May.

The genus *Lathyrus* (old Greek name for some plant of the Pea Family, probably a pea) consists of over 100 species widely distributed, largely in the northern hemisphere, but absent from Australia. The best known species is *L. odoratus,* from Sicily, cultivated for several hundred years, and is the species from which the principal garden Sweet Peas have been developed. California has about 15 species, but they are largely small-flowered and have little horticultural merit.

Lathyrus splendens (Latin for brilliant) was described as new in 1876 by Dr. Albert Kellogg (1813-1886, beloved California botanist, and one of the founders of the California Academy of Sciences). The original specimens were collected in San Diego Co. by J. M. Hutchings. It is known as the Campo Pea, because of its abundance around Campo, San Diego Co.; it is also called the Pride of California, and rightly so, for it is one of the most magnificent of all California native plants. It is rather widespread in the interior chaparral areas of San Diego Co., and extends south into northern Baja California. It has been collected on the coast at La Jolla and in the interior as far north as Pala, but the reports of its occurrence in southern Riverside Co. need verification.

The Campo Pea is usually found growing in coarse, decomposed granite soils in chaparral. It is thus able to get deeply rooted, is afforded some protection from the sun, and has some convenient support upon which to climb. In early summer the plants go dormant and a portion of the top growth dies back. In late winter the plants come to life again and in a few weeks a vigorous vegetative growth is produced. Perhaps the most effective wild plants of the Campo Pea are those which by chance have grown at the base of one of the blue-flowered Wild-Lilacs (*Ceanothus*) and have grown up through them, often both producing their flowers together.

There is another wild pea, *L. laetiflorus* var. *Alefeldii,* in San Diego Co., which is sometimes mistaken for *L. splendens,* but its flowers are smaller, purplish, the banner is not so strongly deflexed, and it in no way rivals the Campo Pea in beauty.

Lathyrus splendens has long been known in horticulture, but has never attained great popularity, largely because of the difficulties encountered in its propagation. Because it does have such a profusion of spectacular wine-red or maroon flowers when well-grown, we have given it considerable attention in an effort to discover methods of propagation and culture that would make it possible for the average gardener to successfully cultivate it. But thus far, we have had only mediocre results, despite the fact that we have many fine blooming specimens in the Garden in March and April each season.

We first obtained seeds of the Campo Pea in San Diego Co. in 1926 and again in 1927, but there are now no living offspring of these two collections in the Garden. In May, 1931 we gathered a few seeds from a plant 6-8 feet high, growing in the chaparral, 2 mi. east of Dulzura, at 1300 ft. elevation. From these seeds we successfully established a few plants on a gentle north hillside in loamy soil. For several years we harvested nearly every seed produced and were thus able to propagate hundreds of seedlings.

Seeds of *L. splendens* have been planted in flats and in pots, but the latter method has proven better, since the seedlings are difficult to transplant. Either fall or spring planting is satisfactory, but in neither case do the seedlings make sufficient growth to be planted out the same spring and survive the first summer. For this reason we have had to keep the plants in the nursery until the late fall. Cuttings taken from new growth very early in the spring root readily in sand, but appear to be as difficult to handle as seedlings. The permanent location must be selected carefully to provide a little shade, a shrub, fence or trellis for support, a well-drained, coarse soil, and no irrigation except to first establish the plants. If these conditions can be provided, the plants will go through the summer season in a normal dormant condition, and will promptly respond with new growth the following season. Because of the limited number of seeds which we have had, we have never tried to grow the Campo Pea by planting the seeds in the places where the plants are wanted, but believe that this method might be successful, provided the seeds and young plants can be protected from rodents.

CARL B. WOLF

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

Dedication of Garden Foundation to the Board of Trustees for the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden of the Native Plants of California:

"THE NATURE, OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE INSTITUTION HEREBY FOUNDED AND TO BE MAINTAINED HEREUNDER.

ITS NATURE: A botanic garden of the native plants of California, herbarium and botanical library, containing living and/or preserved specimens of trees, plants and flowers native to California, and literature relating thereto.

ITS OBJECT: The preservation and improvement of the property now transferred and such property as may hereafter be transferred to the Trustees for those who not only wish to enjoy, but to study, assembled in one accessible locality, native California plants; and for the advancement of science and education with reference to plant life indigenous to the State of California.

ITS PURPOSES: (a) An institution founded primarily for scientific research in the field of local botany.

(b) To preserve the native California flora, try to replenish the depleted supply of some of the rarest plants which are rapidly being exterminated, and bring together in a comparatively small area as complete a collection of the rich store of native California plants as can be grown in this southern section of the state, thereby promoting the general walfare of the people of the state by providing the means for encouraging and carrying on the above mentioned activities in said state and by doing such other things as may be necessary and desirable to carry out the objects hereof."

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